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MITHRAS IN REGIO VI, UMBRIA

FRAGMENTS OF A SHIPWRECK

Summary: The presence of Mithras in *Regio VI*, Umbria, is documented by materials (some inscriptions, two *arae*, two reliefs, two tauroctonies: one of them fragmentary, the other one almost complete) which were either fortuitously unearthed between the 18th and the 19th century without any further research following, or discovered during unsystematic excavations – in both cases, they ended up lost (or simply forgotten) among the other pieces of family collections. This is how Marquis Eroli and Count Valenti bought, respectively, a relief now kept at the Museo Archeologico in Terni and a fragmentary tauroctony, still visible today in the hall of his ancestral palace in Trevi; Count Ramelli retrieved a tauroctony and some inscriptions in *Sentinum*: the tauroctony was then walled in the hall of his palace in Fabriano and the inscriptions were collected in the *lapidarium* of the palace. Finally, Count Marignoli promoted the excavation of the Mithraeum in Spoleto, dug up by Fabio Gori and documented in drawings and watercolors by the architect Silvestri; currently that Mithraeum has been reduced to a shapeless heap of rubble and its materials are not to be found anywhere.

This is definitely a distressing situation which, however, allows us to outline at least a Mithraic geography in Umbria made up of places along the Via Flaminia, east and west, where initiates to the Mithraic cult used to live, from *Ocriculum* to *Interamna Nahars*, *Montoro*, *Spoletium*, *Trebiae*, *Carsulae* and *Sentinum*, on the junction of the road coming from *Helvillum*. As for the *cultores Mithrae* in *Regio VI*, the few surviving inscriptions speak about them. There are freemen and freedmen, few slaves, some artisans, maybe some landowners or administrators of private and public estates who live and work at in-between towns and *villae*. They participate in the cult by covering various functions and supporting it financially: the *leones* in *Carsulae* collect money to build their *leonteum*; *Sextus Egnatius Primitivus* pays out of pocket to rebuild a *spelaeum* destroyed by an earthquake, while the thirty-five *patroni* of *Sentinum* contribute in different ways to the needs of their community.

Key words: *leonteum*, *mithraeum*, *patroni*, tauroctony, *villa*

*Quantum copiarum in Ocriculano, in Narniensi, in Carsulano...*¹ Thus writes Pliny the Younger to his mother-in-law Pompea Celerina, singing the praises of the *villae* she owned in *Umbria* (in Otricoli, Narni, *Carsulae* and Perugia²), like many other

¹ Plin. *Ep.* 14.

² MANCONI, D. – TOMEI, M. A. – VERZÀR, M.: La situazione in Umbria dal III a.C. alla Tarda Antichità. In GIARDINA, A. – SCHIAVONE, A. (a cura di): *Società romana e produzione schiavistica*. I:

members of Roman aristocracy and Pliny himself (remember his property in *Tifer-num Tiberinum*). Besides being a lovely place to stay, just a short distance from Rome, *Regio VI* also represented for them a productive investment,³ offering a varied and rich production of goods (from foodstuffs to *figulinae*) which could be conveyed easily from their large Umbrian *villae*⁴ to the markets in Rome along roads (*Flaminia* and its junctions) and waterways (the Tiber with its tributaries and canals).⁵ According to Pliny, these *villae*, some of them at least, seemed to be still flourishing in the 2nd century⁶ although some changes had become necessary as time went by.⁷ In the following century they were probably not popular anymore, particularly in southern Umbria, where documents witnessing their presence become scarcer and scarcer or are totally lacking and indicate the progressive exhaustion⁸ of their activities until their ultimate disappearance. Only some of them could survive throughout the 3rd century and Late Antiquity, but only as imperial properties.⁹

In this region, where *villae* and towns created “an uninterrupted continuity of population”,¹⁰ some Mithraic communities also settled between the 2nd and the 3rd century; they left traces in *Ocriculum*, *Interamna Nahars*, Montoro, *Spoletium*, *Trebiae*, *Carsulae*, *Sentinum*, although not all of them can be traced back to a clear context. The Mithraeum in Spoleto can certainly be located in the basement of a suburban villa, and the relief of *Interamna Nahars* is very likely to come from another suburban villa, while the communities in *Ocriculum*, *Carsulae* and *Sentinum*, and possibly the one referred to by the inscription preserved in Montoro Castle, might have been based in towns, not in suburban areas. As for the fragmentary tauroctony in *Trebiae*, it is difficult to make hypotheses about its origin.

ANONYMOUS SIMULACRA

The presence of the Persian god in Terni, Spoleto and Trevi is documented by a relief, a Mithraeum and a fragment, respectively: they were all casual findings. However, while for Spoleto the location is ascertained and for Terni an area of origin can be defined, nothing is known about the fragment from Trevi.

L'Italia: insediamenti e forme economiche. Roma-Bari 1981, 371–406 end 520–525, here 524 nn. 68 and 73.

³ MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 380.

⁴ Villas run by servants which anyway differ from more modest farms located in internal, mountainous areas and characterized by a “one-family subsistence economy”, cf. MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 383.

⁵ MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 383.

⁶ The same can be said about more modest farms, MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 384.

⁷ VERA, D.: Dalla “villa perfecta” alla villa di Palladio: sulle trasformazioni del sistema agrario in Italia fra Principato e Dominato. *Athenaeum*. 83 (1995) 189–211 (part 1) and 331–356 (part 2).

⁸ TOMEI, M. A.: Territorio Narnese-Ternano-Amerino. In MANCONI, D. – TOMEI, M. A. (a cura di): *Ville e insediamenti rustici di Età romana in Umbria*. Perugia 1983, 384.

⁹ Cf. MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 385.

¹⁰ MERCANDO, L. – BRECCIAROLI TABORELLI, L. – PACI, G.: Territorio marchigiano in Età romana: ricerca preliminare. In *Società romana* (n. 2) 311–348, here 319.

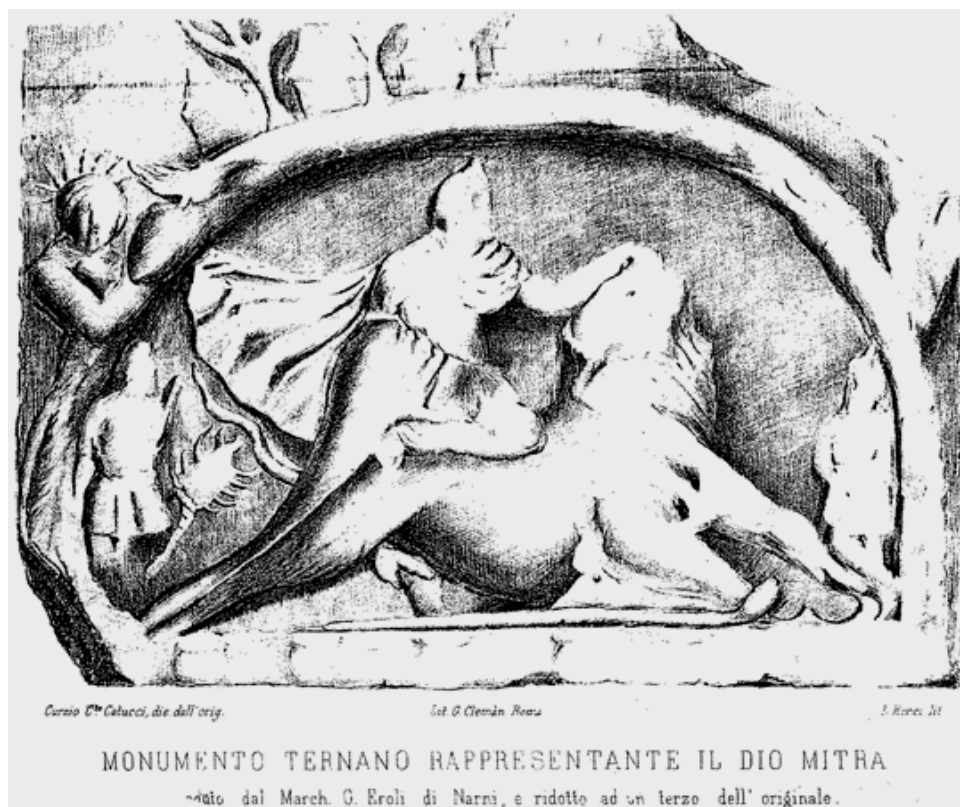


Fig. 1. *Interamna Nahars*. Tauroctony (drawing from EROLI [n. 11] frontispiece)

One day, as I was walking around Terni looking for sculptures and old inscriptions, either fragmented or intact, which I intended to use as decorations for the lodge of my house in Narni, I came across a builder who assured me he owned two artifacts; one of them depicted, according to what he had been told, the Neapolitan character Pulcinella riding a horse. I was very curious to see this peculiar item so, even though it was not fit for my purpose, I asked him to show it to me and I begged him to bring it, together with the other artifact, to the place where I was about to go, someone's house in the vicinity. No sooner said than done; in a few minutes we met at the agreed place – he was holding his marbles in his hands, I was wearing my glasses on my eyes to observe them better. You cannot imagine my surprise when I discovered the real identity of that funny Neapolitan Pulcinella: he was actually the serious and mighty Persian god Mithras, so well renown among archeologists!¹¹ (fig. 1)

¹¹ EROLI, G.: Il dio Mitra a Terni. Extract. *Il Buonarroti* ser. II, 14 (1880) 3–20 and tables 6–7.

From the picturesque account made by marquis Giovanni Erolì about the “recovery” of the relief, we can also get further information about the place where it was found.

He assured me that he had found the marble hidden in the ground in Piedimonte, near Terni, as he was digging there for work. And Piedimonte was actually a most suitable place for the Mithraic cult: there were thick woods, forests, water springs, dark inaccessible caves – both natural and man-made. That mountainous fertile place, so secluded from the town, abounded in all those natural features. He also added that not far from the marble he had found an oxidized iron sword and other *figulinae* which, judging from what he told me, I considered unimportant and devoid of any artistic or historical value whatsoever.¹²

Although he was very interested in the object itself but much less interested in its context, Marquis Erolì made his deal, acquired another piece for his collection and did not show any interest in other materials found along with the relief, materials which would have revealed something about its origin. It came probably from a villa in Piedimonte, near Terni (maybe in Contrada Cerqueto), where a *spelaeum* made for the use of the domestic community most likely underwent the same fate as the villa itself, from prosperity to decay. It can be supposed that, like many other properties in that area, the villa, consequently its *spelaeum*, were abandoned around the 3rd century. After falling into ruin like the rest of the structure, the *simulacrum* was exposed to the eroding effect of the atmospheric agents (as can be assumed by its eroded, faded surface; the only sign of fracture is visible in Mithras’ extended leg). No other comments can plausibly be made about it, and the hypothesis made by Erolì¹³ of a furious destruction of idols perpetrated by fanatic Christians seems hard to support without evidence.

The white marble bas-relief¹⁴ (fig. 2) discovered in 1880 in Piedimonte (near Terni), which became part of the Erolì Collection, is now kept in the Museo Archeo-

¹² EROLÌ (n. 11) 7.

¹³ “An enemy hand damaged and defaced it completely; I do not believe it was due to the ignorance of country people who wanted to have some fun, but rather to the religious fanaticism of Christ’s new followers, triumphing over paganism, who started to tear down its temples and destroy its idols or, when complete destruction seemed to be impossible, tried at least to damage them as much as they could. Many signs of their hatred are clearly visible in various pagan monuments in Rome and Italy, dedicated to Mithras or other gods. They aimed most of all at defacing the gods’ faces, perhaps because through their faces people can usually express their feelings and their soul, so it is especially through that part of our bodies that the attraction between two hearts, that magnetic mesmerizing strength drawing them together, can exert its power. And our imagination can attribute to images the same power we can find in real objects and people.” EROLÌ (n. 11) 8.

¹⁴ EROLÌ (n. 11) 3–20; EROLÌ, G.: *Adunanze dell’Istituto. Bullettino dell’Istituto di Corrispondenza archeologica. Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* (1881) 82–83; CUMONT, F.: *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra [MMM]* I–II. Bruxelles 1896–1899, I 116 and II mon. 96; ROSSI PASSAVANTI, E.: *Interamna Nahars. Storia di Terni dalle origini al Medioevo*. Roma 1932, 198–199 and 325; VERMASEREN, M. J.: *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis Mithriacae*. 2 vols. The Hague, 1956–1960 [CIMRM] 670; TOSCANO, B.: *L’Umbria. Manuali per il territorio. Vol. III–IV: Terni*. Roma 1980, III 186; RINALDI, P.: *L’archeologia dell’antica Interamna. Indagini* 28 (1985) 39–48; RINALDI, P.: *Materiali per il Museo archeologico di Terni*. Terni



Fig. 2. *Interamna Nahars*. Tauroctony, Museo archeologico di Terni (photo by G. Moscati)

logico of the town. Its dimensions are small, 51×39×10, and it is as a whole, a «travail assez soigné mais de mauvaise conservation»,¹⁵ as Cumont pointed out, a quality artifact then, although deteriorated. As for its typology, it falls within the Danubian type,¹⁶ which was particularly widespread in central Europe and which – thanks to its small/medium dimensions – was especially fit for small communities subject to frequent transfers from one place to another. In the middle of the bas-relief we can see Mithras slaying the bull and next to him, on both sides, the torch-bearers: *Cautes* on the left and *Cautopates* on the right; the presence of the second scorpion to the left of *Cautes* should be noticed. Obviously, the loss of some touches of stucco and colour

1985, 82; ZAMPOLINI FAUSTINI, S.: La città romana. In GIORGINI, M.: *Terni. Storia illustrata delle città dell'Umbria*. Milano 1993, 68, fig. 44; ANDREANI, C.: Interamna Nahars: testimonianze di vita politica, economica e sociale. In *Memoria Storica. Rivista del centro studi storici Terni* 6 (1995) 121, num. 7 and fig. 8; ANDREANI, C. – FORA, M.: Interamna Nahars. *Supplementa Italica* 19 (2002) 11–128, here 74–75; GIONTELLA, C.: Terni, Museo Archeologico. Materiali lapidei. In CICCARELLI, A. (a cura di): *Arte e territorio. Interventi di restauro. Vol. 3*. Terni 2006, 300; GIORGI, F.: Rilievo con Mitra tauroctono. In CICCARELLI, F. – SISANI, S.: *Museo Comunale di Terni. Raccolta archeologica. Sezione romana*. Milano–Perugia 2008, 173–174, No. 183, and finally BASTIANELLI MOSCATI, G.: L'Universo in una grotta. Il rilievo mitriaco di Terni e la sua simbologia. *Automata. Rivista di Natura, Scienza, e Tecnica del Mondo Antico*. 3–4 (2008–2011) 83–93.

¹⁵ CUMONT (n. 14) II 254.

¹⁶ TURCAN, R.: *Mithra et le Mithriacisme*. Paris 2004, 57–58; and, in particular, type VII and subtype C, cf. CAMPBELL, L. A.: *Mithraic Iconography and Ideology*, Leiden 1968, 2–3; or type C and subtype 2, cf. VOLLKOMMER, R.: Mithras Tauroctonus – Studien zu einer Typologie der Stieropferszene auf Mithrasbildwerken. *MEFRA* 103 (1991) 265–281, here 271.

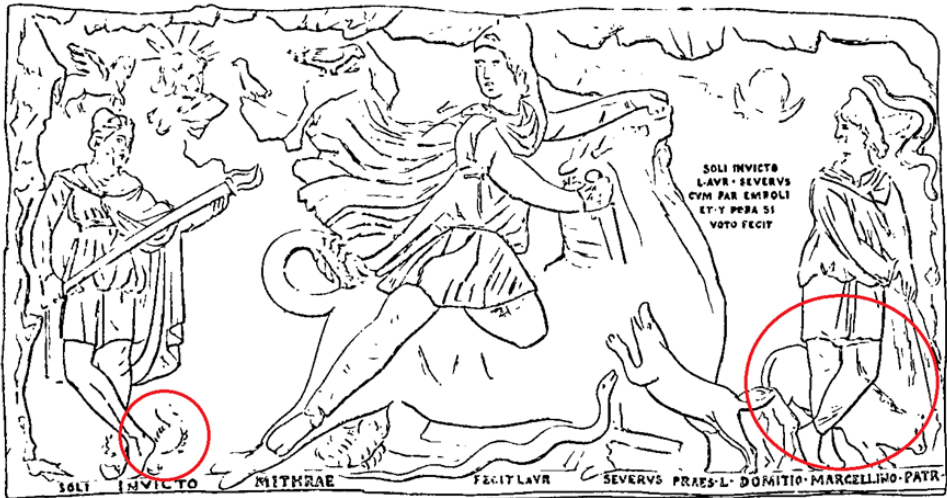


Fig. 3. Rilievo Torlonia (drawing from CUMONT [n. 14] II 195, fig. 20)

might have erased precious details which would have helped in interpreting the picture. At any rate, according to the knowledge gathered so far, the presence of the scorpion near the genie of the rising sun represents an anomaly, if it is to be referred, as it usually is, to the autumnal equinox.¹⁷ In statues coming from Dacia¹⁸ and in other reliefs¹⁹ it is normally *Cautopates*, the allegory of autumn, who has a scorpion next to him and he is counterposed to *Cautes* and a bull (a bull head usually), an allegorical representation of the spring equinox. Only in the Torlonia bas-relief,²⁰ dating back to 181,²¹ is *Cautes* associated with a scorpion, but *Cautopates* has a bull moving on his side (fig. 3).

The other symbols in the bas-relief fit into standards: the seven altars alternating with the seven trees, over the cave, and the seven *urcei* below, all symbolize the

¹⁷ VERMASEREN, M. J.: *Mithriaca IV: le monument d'Ottaviano Zeno et le culte de Mithra sur le Célius*. Leiden 1978, 25–53.

¹⁸ Cf. *CIMRM* 1956–1957, from *Apulum, Dacia*; *CIMRM* 2120–2123, from *Sarmizegetusa, Dacia*; *CIMRM* 2185, from Transylvania, *Dacia*, only *Cautes* is left but the second torch-bearer *Cautopates* was likely to be present too; finally, the one from Boppard, near Bonn, should also be remembered, cf. SCHWERTHEIM, E.: *Die Denkmäler orientalischer Gottheiten im römischen Deutschland*. Leiden 1974, 56, n. 51.

¹⁹ *CIMRM* 335 from Rome, here the torch-bearers are missing but there are two trees with torches symbolizing them; anyway *Cautes*' torch is superimposed on the pine tree, a symbol of winter, while *Cautopates*' one crosses a fruit-laden tree, a symbol of summer, while they should be positioned the other way round, cf. CUMONT (n. 14) I 211, n. 3; *CIMRM* 694, from Bologna, *Cautes* and *Cautopates* are flanked by trees and their respective equinoctial symbols; *CIMRM* 2306, from Tirgușor, *Moesia inferior*, the scorpion is associated with *Cautopates*, on the left side of the tauroctony, while *Cautes*, on the other side, holds a pine cone in his hand. In bas-relief *CIMRM* 2006, from Doștat, *Dacia*, *Cautes* is the only one who has an attribute, a bull, and the same is true for the relief from *Apulum, Dacia*, *CIMRM* 1973 (although here the torch-bearer can hardly be seen); in relief *CIMRM* 1983, from *Apulum, Dacia*, only *Cautopates* is associated with a scorpion (although it must be mentioned that in this case both torch-bearers are hardly visible).

²⁰ *CIMRM* 408.

²¹ Cf. the inscriptions *CIMRM* 409–410.

seven planetary gods. As for the letters roughly written on the back, *DNG[---] / ICT+[---]*,²² their totally marginal position leads us to think that they might identify a quarry²³ or be a code added in recent times²⁴ rather than represent a dedication to an emperor²⁵ (Gordian, Gallienus or Galerius).

Also the *cultores Mithrae* in *Spoletium*, who attended the Mithraeum set up in the basement of a suburban villa, were anonymous, although some inscriptions²⁶ from that area mention the *Caesii*, a family which owned properties and a mausoleum²⁷ in that territory. Excavations carried out in different periods (the latest dating back to 1978) have allowed us to recompose various sectors of the *villa*,²⁸ located where Villa Redenta²⁹ can be seen now, in a place quite close to town known as *I Casini*, *Campo S. Gregorio* or *Campo del Vescovo* (the Bishop's field), which has always been a "treasure trove" of archeological materials (e.g. some of the marbles from that area were reused in the church of St. Gregorio).

The Mithraeum,³⁰ discovered by mere chance between 1878 and 1879³¹ and located outside the walls now surrounding Villa Redenta and its park, is clearly related

²² *CIL* XI 4235.

²³ Cf. TOSCANO (n. 14) III 186.

²⁴ CUMONT (n. 14) II mon. 96.

²⁵ *D(omino) N(ostro) G[ordiano Pio Fel(ici) Inv]/icto [Aug(usto)], or D(omino) N(ostro) G[allieno Inv]/icto [Aug(usto)] or even D(omino) N(ostro) G[alerio Val(erio) Maximiano Inv]/icto [Aug(usto)]*, cf. ANDREANI-FORA (n. 14) 74–75.

²⁶ *CIL* XI 4798.

²⁷ COLETTI, E.: Spoleto. In *Ville e insediamenti rustici* (n. 8) 186–194.

²⁸ Latest research carried out between the old Via Flaminia and via delle Lettere has identified the sector of the villa which probably hosted the services; to this, other finds must be added: structures belonging to the same villa, in particular a floor in *opus spicatum*, found in Villa Redenta's park, and a black-and-white mosaic floor coming from the same area and rebuilt inside the villa, COLETTI (n. 27) 192, as well as the rooms discovered behind Villa Redenta, one of which was adapted to house a Mithraeum, cf. F. GORI: Comunicazione. *Archivio storico artistico archeologico e letterario della città e provincia di Roma*. II (1877) 367–368; F. GORI: Comunicazione. *Archivio storico artistico archeologico e letterario della città e provincia di Roma*. III (1878–1879) 56–62 and 252–256; F. GORI: Sulla distruzione di Spoleto e sulle antiche vie percorse dall'esercito del Barbarossa. *Bollettino della Regia Deputazione di Storia Patria per l'Umbria* 4 (1898) 53 n. 5; COOTE, H. CH.: On the Mithraeum at Spoleto. *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquity* 47 (1882) 205–208.

²⁹ Also known as villa della Genga, Locatelli, Martorelli, Orsini and, finally, Marignoli.

³⁰ GORI 1877 (n. 28) 367–368; GORI 1878–1879 (n. 28) 56–62 and 252–256; GORI: Sulla distruzione (n. 28) 53, n. 5; BRACARDI, D.: Spoleto. *NotSc* (1878) 231–232 and 253; EROLI (n. 11) 4–5, n. 2; COOTE (n. 28) 205–208; SORDINI, G.: Avanzi di edifici romani scoperti in contrada "Campo del Vescovo" nei pressi della città. *NotSc* (1890) 180; CUMONT I (n. 14) 54–66 and 113–114 and CUMONT II (n. 14) mon. 97; PIETRANGELI, C.: *Spoletium. Regio VI, Umbria* [Italia romana: Municipi e Colonie, ser. I, vol. I]. Roma 1939, 102–103; *CIMRM* I 673–677; TOSCANO, B.: *Spoletum in pietre. Guida artistica della città*. Spoleto 1963, 49; DI MARCO, L.: *Spoletium. Topografia e urbanistica*. Spoleto 1975, 97–98; COLETTI (n. 27); VERZAR, M.: Da San Gemini a Bevagna. In GAGGIOTTI M. – MANCONI, D. – MERCANDO, L. – VERZAR, M.: *Umbria–Marche*. Roma–Bari 1993, 118 and 128; SISANI, S.: *Umbria–Marche*. Roma–Bari 2006, 132; BASTIANELLI MOSCATI, G.: Il mitreo di spoleto. *BDSPU* 104 (2007) 27–54; MARZANO, A.: *Roman Villas in Central Italy. A Social and Economic History* [Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 30]. Leiden 2007, 735 and finally ZUDDAS, E.: L'Umbria nell'era costantiniana. In BRAVI, A. (ed.): *Aurea Umbria. Una regione dell'Impero nell'era di Costantino. Catalogue of the Exhibition (Spello, Palazzo Comunale 2012)*. Viterbo 2012, 68.

³¹ BASTIANELLI MOSCATI (n. 30) 32.

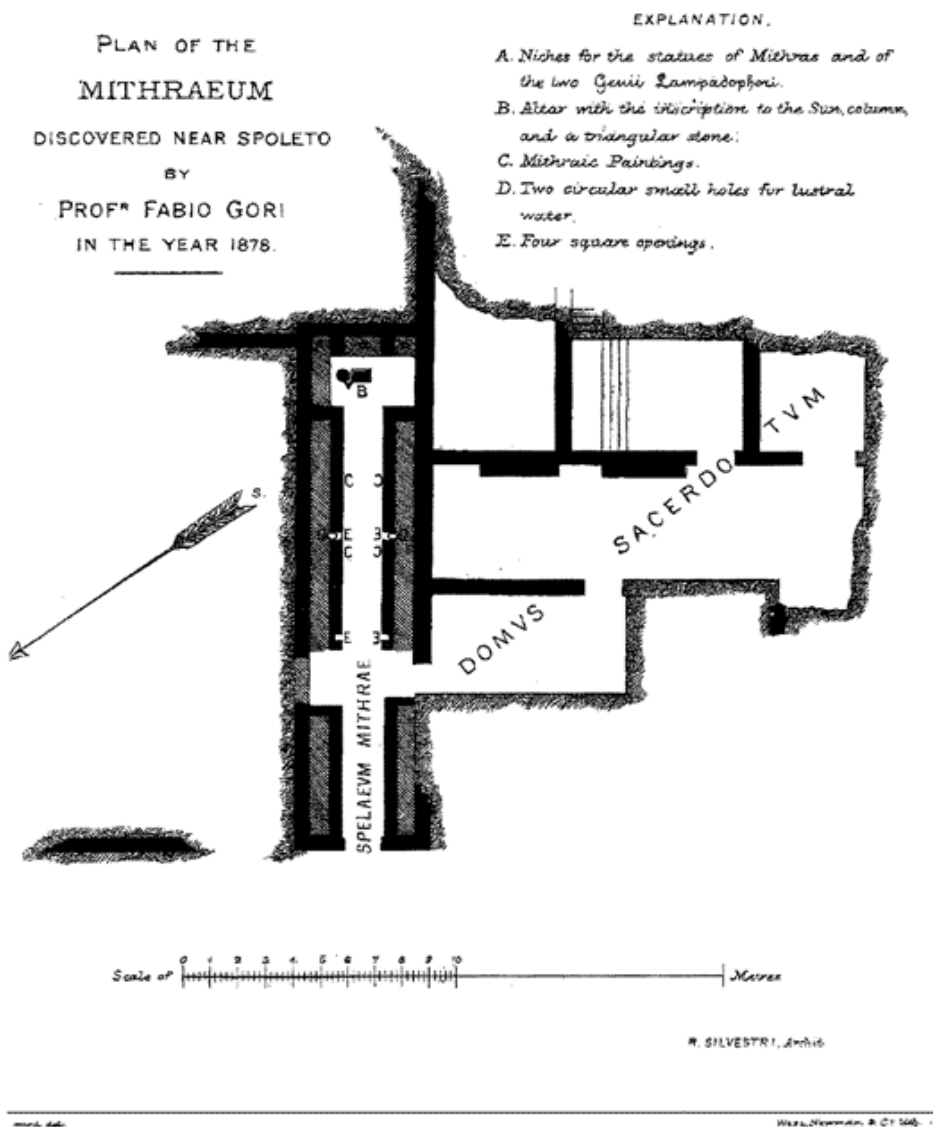


Fig. 4. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Relief by Silvestri architect (from COOTE [n. 28] tab. VII)

to the previous Roman villa, whose extension must have been very large, stretching over the area of Villa Redenta and beyond. The underground Mithraeum occupied part of the basement – as shown in the survey made by architect Silvestri³² (fig. 4)

³² Published by COOTE (n. 28), BASTIANELLI MOSCATI (n. 30) 33.



Fig. 5. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Saturn, watercolor by Silvestri architect (owned by the municipality of Spoleto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Spoleto)

and had a SE-NW orientation (altar in the South East, entrance in the North West); its structure was typical of Mithraism: central corridor with side *podia* (two symmetrical interruptions broke up its linear continuity); the *podia* (0.77 tall) had four symmetrical niches at their base (two for each podium) and circular hollows on their surface. The *dimensions* (18.42×4) of this temple make it comparable with the largest Mithraea in Ostia: the Mithraeum delle Terme del Mitra (15.37×4.55); the Mithraeum del Palazzo Imperiale (16.70×5.25), the Mithraeum delle Pareti Dipinte (17.50×4.00) and the Mithraeum degli Animali (16.30×4.00/4.50). At the time of the finding, Mercury and Saturn³³ (figs 5, 6, 7, 8) were still recognizable on the front of the right hand

³³ Reproduced in three watercolors (41,7×57,5) by architect Silvestri, owned by the Municipality and now kept in Spoleto at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale.



Fig. 6. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Mercury, watercolor by Silvestri architect
(owned by the municipality of Spoleto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Spoleto)

bench, while the gods depicted on the opposite bench were deteriorated. On the background wall, thanks to two marble bases placed against it, three niches opened with a small seat on the right and a longer bench on the left; in front of them there was an *ara*,³⁴ with a dedication,³⁵ and next to it a sharp tapered cipolin marble stone with a hole,³⁶ maybe the *petra genetrix*,³⁷ and another rough-hewn stone shaped like a triangular prism³⁸ (figs 9, 10).

³⁴ *CIMRM* I 674.

³⁵ *Soli / Invicto Mithrae / Sacrum*, *CIL* XI 4774 = *CIMRM* I 674.

³⁶ *CIMRM* I 675.

³⁷ Similar to the one found in the Mithraeum del Palazzo Imperiale in Ostia, cf. BECATTI, G.: *Scavi di Ostia. Vol. II: I Mitrei*. Roma 1954, 54.

³⁸ *CIMRM* I 676.



Fig. 7. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Saturn (drawing from CUMONT [n. 14] II 255–257, fig. 91)



Fig. 8. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Mercury (drawing from CUMONT [n. 14] II 255–257, fig. 92)

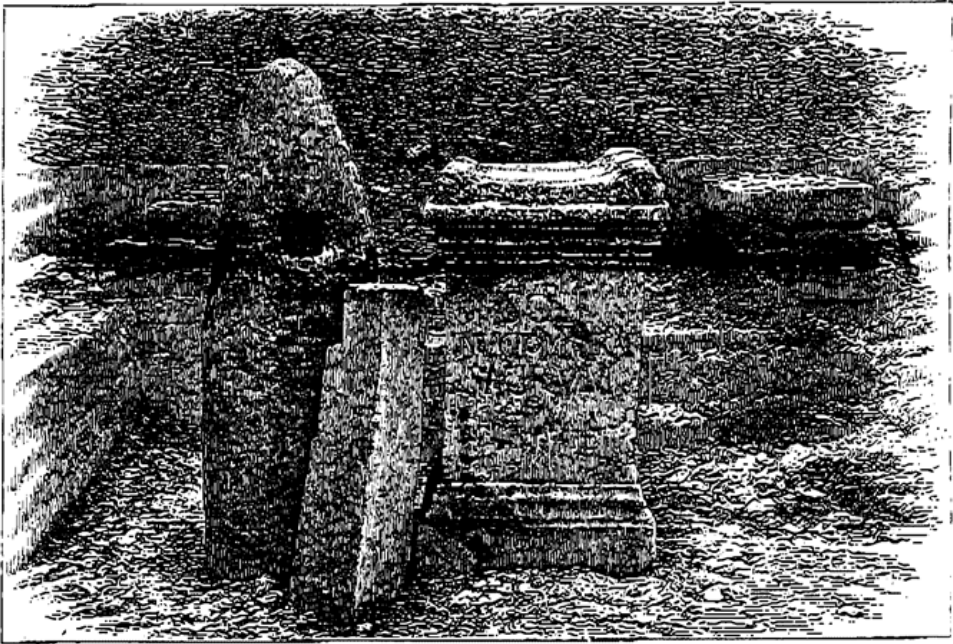
Some marble tiles, which were part of the floor, were still *in situ*³⁹ but many others were found mixed with mosaic *tesserae* and red plaster fragments; they indicate that, besides being partially or totally paved with marble, the sacred place had been frescoed and decorated with mosaics. All the finds collected inside the structure were lost (among them a small statue of Apollo, made of bone or ivory), as well as all the other materials (among them a marble fragment with Zodiac signs) found in the rooms adjoining the Mithraeum both left and right. As for the arm (fig. 11), now in Spoleto at the Museo Archeologico Nazionale and previously part of the Canzio Saporì Collection, it can be ascribed to the area of the Mithraeum only thanks to a note written on it in pencil by the collector himself.

While in the sixties of the 20th century, even if surrounded by garbage and rubble, part of the Mithraeum was still visible,⁴⁰ now whoever goes to via B. Buozzi will see just a shapeless heap of stones, partially hidden by luxuriant and invasive vegetation (fig. 12), an isolated case⁴¹ of emergency situation due to the peculiar urban

³⁹ BRACARDI (n. 30) 231.

⁴⁰ TOSCANO: Spoleto (n. 30) 49.

⁴¹ A Mithraeum was never isolated but always related to some other structure, *domus*, *villa*, warehouse, factory, spa baths or important political areas where or in whose whereabouts the people attending the Mithraeum lived. This is why many *spelea* attended by military and civilians have been found along the Roman *limes* in military camps and *canabae*. Most of them date back to the 2nd–3rd century when the



INTERIOR OF THE "SPELAEUM MITHRAE" AT SPOLETO.

Fig. 9. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum (drawing from COOTE [n. 28] 206)

transformation that area underwent during centuries (the railway station of the Spoleto-Norcia, 1913–1926, behind – and the houses built in via B. Buozzi, both left and right), which wiped out the sector of the *villa* where the Mithraeum was located.

The Mithraeum inside the *villa*, attended between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD,⁴² was functional to the needs of those who lived and worked there and its dimensions made it fit for housing a large number of initiates, probably personnel working in the *villa*, at the peak of its activities. Therefore the Mithraeum can more plausibly be dated back to the 2nd and 3rd century AD⁴³ rather than to the 4th,⁴⁴ even hypothesizing a renovation of the productive and housing structure of the

Mithras' cult reached its peak; the others were built in the 4th century (anew or by renovating previous structures) when the number of initiates shrank to a few members belonging at first to the highest ranks of the army and later on to the *nobilitas*.

⁴² Cf. COLETTI (n. 27) 192.

⁴³ And here, in the light of further evidence I have gathered more recently, I would like to correct my own previous dating hypothesis which suggested a time between the 3rd and 4th century, cf. BASTIANELLI MOSCATI (n. 30) 50.

⁴⁴ GORI 1878–1879 (n. 28) 254; PIETRANGELI (n. 30) 103; DI MARCO (n. 30) 98; COLETTI (n. 27) 192, 193 and n. 12; VERZAR (n. 30) 118 and 128; SISANI (n. 30) 132; MARZANO (n. 30) 735 and finally ZUDDAS (n. 30) 68.

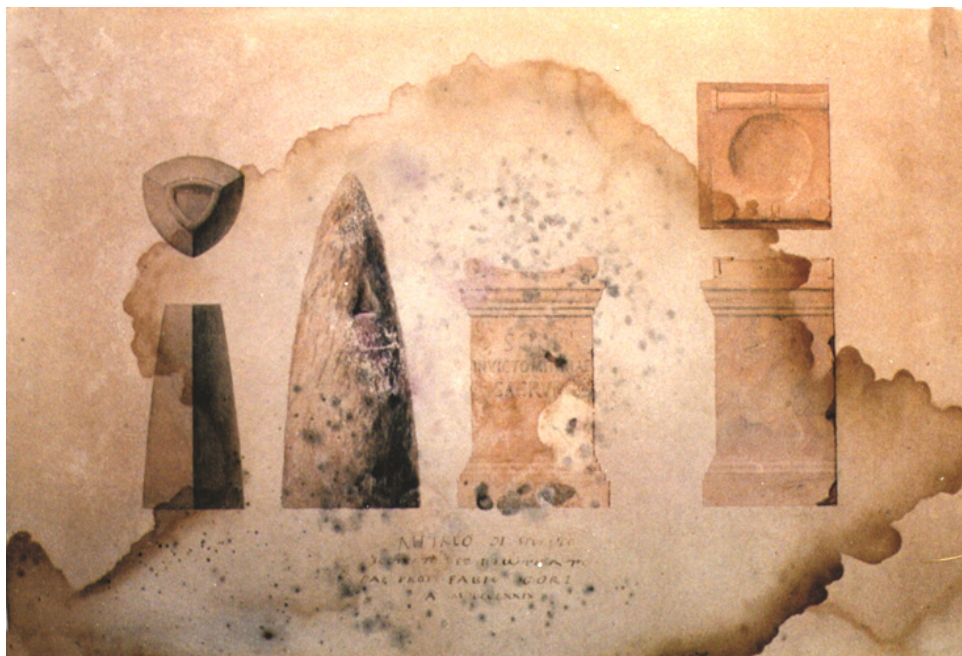


Fig. 10. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Watercolor by Silvestri architect
(owned by the municipality, of Spoleto, Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Spoleto, *petra genetrix*, *ara*)

villa,⁴⁵ which nevertheless must have been a minor one. Besides, the presence of two coins depicting Constantine and Gratian⁴⁶ found in the earth⁴⁷ piled up on the left *podium* and next to the right one,⁴⁸ does not seem enough to prove that the Mithraeum continued to be used in that century. Probably both the *villa* and the Mithraeum were abandoned at the same time and the Mithraeum was no more used when it was destroyed by a fire whose traces are still visible on its structure and materials.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ The hypothesis of a renovation of the villa in the 4th century has been suggested, cf. MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZAR (n. 2) 398 nr. 122.

⁴⁶ "The two coins of Costantino and Graziano unburied from the ashes of the last fire clearly indicate that such worship flourished here until the fall of paganism", cf. GORI 1878–1879 (n. 28) 254; hence the dating hypothesized by Gori and then accepted by the following scholars, cf. *supra*, n. 44.

⁴⁷ Having been found in the earth, they are not very meaningful. Instead, coins are significant when they are offered to the god and collected in special containers, think about Martigny Mithraeum, WIBLÉ, F.: *Les petits objets du mithreum de Martigny/Forum Claudii Vallensium*. In MARTENS, M. – De BOE, G. (eds): *Roman Mithraism: The Evidence of the Small Finds. Atti della Conferenza Internazionale, Tienen, Belgio, 7–8 November 2001* [Archeologie in Vlaanderen, Monografie 4]. Bruxelles 2004, 139; or "sealed" in the structure of the Mithraeum itself and its furnishings, for example the coins of Adrian and Antoninus Pius sealed in the southern *podium* of the Mithraeum delle Sette porte in Ostia or the billon of Valerian walled in the background altar of the Mithraeum della *Planta pedis* also in Ostia, cf. BECATTI (n. 37) 82 and 94.

⁴⁸ GORI 1878–1879 (n. 28) 62.

⁴⁹ GORI 1878–1879 (n. 28) 57–60.



Fig. 11. *Spoletium*, Mithraeum. Marble arm (already in Canzio Saporì Collection, Museo Archeologico Nazionale of Spoleto)

The third and last anonymous simulacrum comes from *Trebiae*. It is a fragmentary tauroctony that count Giacomo Valenti managed to get hold of, drawn by the same “collector’s spirit” which had pushed marquis Erolì to acquire the Piedimonte relief.



Fig. 12. *Spolegium*, Mithraeum. Current state (photo by G. Moscati)

On that occasion I saw that an artisan from Trevi had over his house door a veal, and I insisted so much that yesterday morning he sent it to me as a gift.⁵⁰

This is what count Valenti wrote, not without a touch of gloat, to Ridolfino Venuti in a letter dated 8th November 1760,⁵¹ without adding any further information about the origin of the piece, which was obviously the result of previous acts of plunder. The rest of the comments are all about iconography, and they are not even very reliable: just to cite one, the reference to a supposed “wing fragment”⁵² found in the back side

⁵⁰ G. Valenti's letter to R. Venuti, Trevi 8th November 1760, kept at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vati. Lat. 7292 (*Dissertazioni e Lettere dell'Abate Ridolfino Venuti e di altri a lui scritte*), sheets 115r and v, 116r; cf. PROSPERI VALENTI, G.: Una scultura mitriaca di Trevi in una lettera inedita di Ridolfino Venuti. In CASALE, V. – COARELLI, F. – TOSCANO, B. (edd): *Scritti di Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte in onore di Carlo Pietrangeli*. Roma 1996, 101–102.

⁵¹ PROSPERI VALENTI (n. 50) 101–102.

⁵² PROSPERI VALENTI (n. 50) 101–102.

of the bull, also shared by Venuti, who speaks about a “remnant of wings”,⁵³ is actually wrong: it does not belong to any wings but instead to the sheaf usually coming out from the tail of the animal in such representations.

As for the marble group of Mithras Tauroctonus,⁵⁴ not very big 42×67×15 and finely sculpted on one side, only the bull with the sheaf, the scorpion and the snake survived (figs 13a and 13b). Mithras must have been fixed with pegs on the back of the animal, where holes are still visible. The fragment, maybe coming from the Trevi area and reused to decorate a local house (whose position is still unknown), has recently been published by Giuseppina Prosperi Valenti, who is now its jealous owner. Kept in the hall of Palazzo Valenti in Trevi, it is not documented in any other iconographic or bibliographic source, apart from those published by the scholar/owner herself.

THE *CULTORES MITHRAE* IN REGIO VI

Unlike the ones analysed so far, the following materials, despite uncertainty about their origin, can give us at least the names of the *cultores Mithrae* who offered their god proof of their devotion.

In *Ocriculum*,⁵⁵ perhaps in a city Mithraeum, *pater Valerius Marinus* dedicated a tauroctony (fig. 14) to Mithras between the 2nd and the 3rd century AD. The white marble bas-relief,⁵⁶ now kept in the Vatican Museums (Loggia Scoperta, inv. n. 18), was recomposed by putting together various fragments found during papal excavations⁵⁷ carried out in the old part of the town and its surroundings between 1776 and 1777. It was transferred to the Galleria lapidaria Vaticana and only later did it become possible to associate it with an inscription⁵⁸ written on two fragments of a marble *tabula*, also from Otricoli, describing the tauroctony as an *ex-voto* by *Valerius Marinus*; till then, the inscription had wrongly been considered to have a Roman origin. The tauroctony depicts Mithras slaying the bull, in the middle, and two other episodes from his life: the birth, top right, and the *transitus*, left. In the lower part, in the middle, between the Moon chariot and the Sun chariot, the Sun itself, kneels in front of Mithras.

⁵³ R. Venuti's letter written in 11th November 1760, from Rome, in reply to G. Valenti, kept like the previous one at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vati. Lat. 7292 (n. 50) sheets 115r and v, 116r, cf. PROSPERI VALENTI (n. 50) 101–103 and nn. 4, 7 and 10.

⁵⁴ PROSPERI VALENTI (n. 50).

⁵⁵ Two other inscriptions come from Otricoli: one, *CIMRM* 684, now lost, only bore the name of the god Mithra; the other, very fragmentary, is now kept at the Collegiata di Santa Maria Assunta in Otricoli. The latter was attributed to a Mithraic environment by Pietrangeli because of the terms *pater* and *iussus* it contained: *Iussu Au(reli?) / ...alis patri(s)*; cf. PIETRANGELI, C.: *Otricoli, un lembo dell'Umbria alle porte di Roma*. Roma 1978, 34 and n. 132.

⁵⁶ *CIMRM* 556; PIETRANGELI, C.: *Lo scavo pontificio di Otricoli*. *RendPontAcc* 19 (1942–1943) 52, 70, 89, and PIETRANGELI (n. 55) 33–34.

⁵⁷ PIETRANGELI (n. 56) 52, 70 and 89.

⁵⁸ *Val(erius) Marinus pater signu[m] Invicti Mit<hr=RH>(a)e ex voto pos[uit]*, *CIL* VI 743 = *CIMRM* 625.



Fig. 13a. *Trebiae*, fragmentary tauroctony, *recto*. Palazzo Prosperi Valenti
(from PROSPERI VALENTI [n. 50] 109)



Fig. 13b. *Trebiae*, fragmentary tauroctony, *verso*. Palazzo Prosperi Valenti
(from PROSPERI VALENTI [n. 50] 109)



Fig. 14. *Ocriculum*, Tauroctony. Musei Vaticani, Loggia scoperta (open lodge)
(http://www.mithraeum.eu/monumenta/tauroctonia_de_la_loggia_scoperta)

In the Castle of Montoro (Narni) a marble *tabula* with inscription⁵⁹ (figs 15a and 15b) is kept; it was recomposed from various fragments (the upper right corner is still missing) found in the basement of the castle⁶⁰ along with other archeological material of uncertain origin, which perhaps had been stored there to become the first nucleus of a collection.⁶¹ The text written on the *tabula* is a precious document revealing

⁵⁹ *Soli et Invicto Mithrae / ex permissu san[ctissimi] / ordinis dec[ur(ionum)] / Sex(tus) Egnatius Primitivus / sacerdos probatus VTvir / Aug(ustalis) Casuen<t=I>i et Carsulis / q(uaestor) arcae Aug(ustalium) designat(us) / spe<l=I>aeum vi motu(!) terrae di/ruptum ex suo omni / i<m=N>mpensa/re<f=E>ecit*, cf. CIOTTI, U.: Due iscrizioni mitriache inedite. In DE BOER, M. – EDRIDGE, A. T. (eds): *Hommage a Maarten J. Vermaseren*. Vol. I. Leiden 1978, 233–246, 239–246 and tabb XXVIII, XXIX, XXX; PETRACCIA LUCERNONI, M. F.: L'iscrizione mitraica di Montoro: un frammento inedito. *Epigraphica* 58 (1996) 51–59 and fig. 1; *AE* 1996, 601.

⁶⁰ BOLLI, G.: *Montoro. Storia di un castello umbro e di una famiglia romana*. Roma 1956.

⁶¹ EROLI, G.: All'Illustrissimo e Chiarissimo Signore Dot. Guglielmo Henzen Segretario dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica in Roma. In *Miscellanea storica narnese compilata per Giovanni March. Erolì socio dell'Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica di Roma e di altre Accademie*. Vol. I.

how the initiates were not only involved in the construction and maintenance⁶² of their places of worship, but also in their renovation, usually made necessary by mere obsolescence,⁶³ but which, in this case, was exceptionally due to the destructive effects of an earthquake. The renovation works were taken care of by *sacerdos probatus*⁶⁴ *Sextus Egnatius Primitivus*, *Sevir Augustalis* in *Casuentum* and *Quaestor Arcae Augustalium* from *Carsulae*. It is certain that an earthquake imposed some economy on the use of materials and it is not by chance that *Sextus Egnatius Primitivus* had the old moulding of a statue base reused as a support for the inscription; the holes for the pegs previously used to fix the statue are still visible (fig. 15b). Unfortunately, the location of the Mithraeum remains totally unknown,⁶⁵ maybe *Casuentum* or *Carsulae*; the former town has not yet been located⁶⁶ and the latter has notoriously been hit by significant underground instability also due to major seismic activity.⁶⁷ Anyway,

Narni 1858, 379; EROLI (n. 11) 1–20; EROLI, G.: *Descrizione delle chiese di Narni*. Narni 1898, 401, n. 3; Bolli (n. 61); MANSUELLI, G. A.: Narni nell'antichità. In BIGOTTI, M. – MANSUELLI, G. A. – PRANDI, A.: *Narni*. Roma 1973, 116, 6b, c; MANCONI-TOMEI-VERZÀR (n. 2) 394, No. 79; TOMEI (n. 8) 197, No. 117.

⁶² In a Mithraeum every offer to the god is accurately documented: from the construction (*facere*) to the reconstruction (*reficere* and *restituere*) of the *spelaeum* especially if *conlapsum*, *conlabsum* or *labefactatum*; as well as any other improvement (*repingere*, *marmorare*) even if limited to parts of the *spelaeum* and not involving the whole building (*porticum*, *apparatorium*, *exedram*, *columnas*, *pronaum*, *parietem*).

⁶³ In *Nersae*, Civitella di Nesce, Rieti, in the territory of the *Res Publica Aequiculorum*, a Mithraeum *vetustate conlabsum* was renovated, *permissu ordinis*, cf. *CIL* IX 4110 = *CIMRM* 648.

⁶⁴ A *sacerdos* is *probatus* or *legitimus*, cf. the text of the inscription from *Carsulae*, probably by decision of an *ordo sacerdotum*. In a Mithraic context we cannot speak of a clergy and the priestly functions were carried out by laymen (obviously initiates) “exerçant parallèlement à leur service cultuel certaines activités professionnelles et profanes: commerciales, administratives ou militaires”, cf. TURCAN, R.: Images et fonctions du « clergé » mithriaque. In *La figure du prêtre dans les grandes traditions religieuses. Actes du Colloque organisé en hommage à M. l'abbé Julien Ries à l'occasion de ses 80 ans par les Départements de Langues et littératures classiques et de Philosophie des Facultés Universitaires Notre Dame de la Paix en collaboration avec la Société belgo-luxembourgeoise d'Histoire des Religions. Namur, 26–28 octobre 2000*. Leuven 2005, 74. The *sacerdotes* become a link between man and god and “en appliquant un rituel approprié ils contribuent à la *pax deorum*. Notion capitale de la piété romaine”, *ibid.* 73. As for dedications, the priest, but not only him cf., *infra*, nn. 89 and 90, can be referred to with different titles from one case to the next, *asstans* (*CIL* VI 746 = *ILS* 4202) or *prosedens*, cf. the text of the inscription in *Sentinum* cf. *infra*, n. 86.

⁶⁵ About its provenance from the area of Montoro, CIOTTI (n. 59) 241–242 and PETRACCIA LUCERONON (n. 59) 51.

⁶⁶ No traces have so far been found of the *municipium* of *Casuentum*, mentioned by Plin. *Hist. nat.* III 113, apart from this inscription in Montoro and another one, *CIL* XI 4209 = *CIL* IX *91,2 = *ILS* 6630 = *AE* 2001 857, dated 240, coming from Terni and kept there in the Museo Archeologico. Its text, lines 6 and 8, mentions the *Casuentini* who, together with the *Interamnates* and *Vindenates*, had celebrated the *equus romanus* *Titus Flavius Isidorus* with a statue. Considering both documents, cf. SENSI, L.: Testi epigrafici di Montoro (Casuentum?). *Epigraphica* 59 (1997) 370, hypothesized that the *municipium* was located in the territory of Narni. But this is just one of the various hypotheses made throughout the years; for details about the *vexata quaestio* Ciotti (n. 60) 43 and RENZI, P.: Insediamenti e luoghi di culto nel circondario di Cesi dalla Preistoria sino all'epoca romana. *Memoria Storica. Rivista del centro studi storici di Terni* 7 (1995), 61–62.

⁶⁷ Documents show that during the 3rd century there were at least four earthquakes in the area, dated, respectively, 217, 223 (between September and October), 262 and 275. Comparing these data with what is considered to be so far the latest documentation about the *augustales*, i.e. the inscription from



Fig. 15a. Montoro, inscription, *recto* (from CIOTTI [n. 59] 233–246, 239–246 and tab. XXIX)

whatever the location, *Sextus Egnatius Primitivus* had the *spelaeum* rebuilt there, at his own expense and not without the permission of the local authority, the *sanctissimus ordo decurionum*, which authorized its reconstruction.

It must be underlined how significant the incipit of the inscription is, *Soli et Invicto Mithrae*, with at least one match in the inscription from Prutting in *Noricum*.⁶⁸

Nemausus (Nîmes), *AE* 1910 217, dated 245, it seems logical to date the inscription from Montoro to 217 or 223. However, if the *seviri* mentioned in another inscription from *Carsulae*, *CIL* XI 4589, dated 270, were to be interpreted as *seviri augustales*, very different chronological perspectives could appear, beyond the *terminus* of 245 but still within the 3rd century. In any case, it is worth remembering that there might have been other earthquakes in this area during the 3rd century, even if they are difficult to identify because ancient sources tend to focus on Rome as the centre of any significant event, including catastrophic ones, cf. BOSCHI, E. – GUIDOBONI, E. – FERRARI, G. – GASPERINI, P. – VALENSISE, G.: *Catalogo dei forti terremoti in Italia dal 461 a.C. al 1990*. Bologna 1997, 129–130, and only rarely the damage caused by such catastrophes is reported, cf. TRAINA, G.: *Archeologia e trasformazioni del territorio*. Roma 1985, 872, so the reference contained in the sentence *spelaeum vi motu terrae diruptum* stands out as a relevant exception.

⁶⁸ [Soli] e[t] / [D(eo)] I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / [, NIBayern 31.

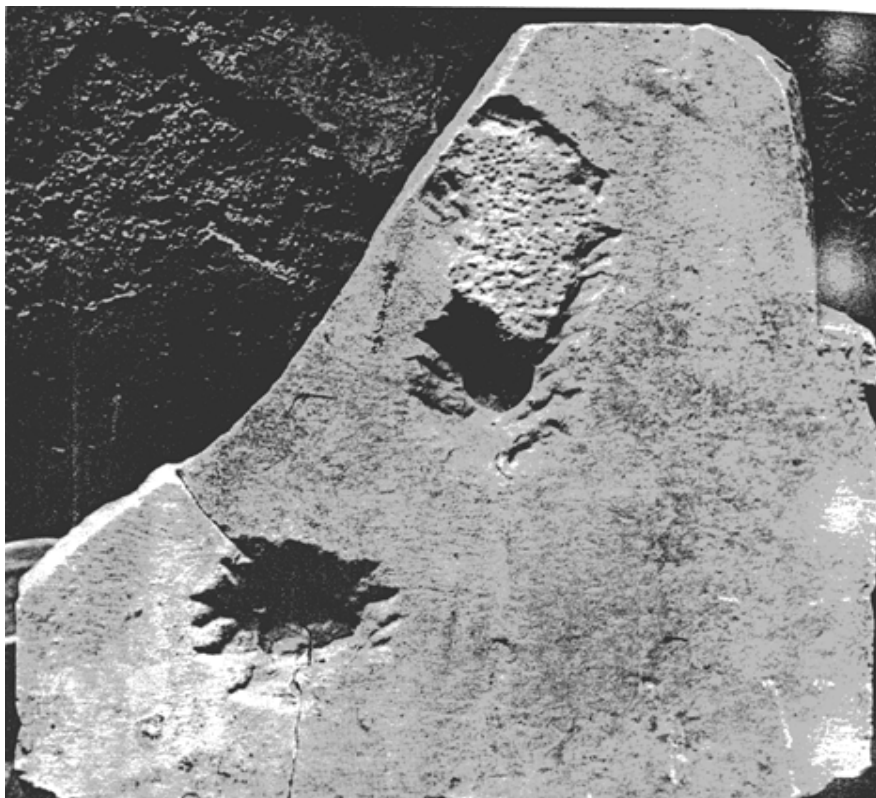


Fig. 15b. Montoro, inscription, verso (from CIOTTI [n. 59] I 233–246, 239–246 and tab. XXX)

the two divine entities, usually assimilated into one (*Soli Invicto Mithrae*), are distinct here, although they are still linked to each other, and *Sol* takes the precedence.⁶⁹ Just a detail, of course, but the reference to the solar theology which in that period was spreading widely cannot be missed; proof of this can also be found, concretely, in the transformation of the Mithraeum in *Novae* (Svištov), in *Moesia Inferior*, into a Temple of the Sun.⁷⁰ The orientation of the structure changes, the altar of *Sol* is

⁶⁹ Different from the formula *Deo Invicto Mithrae et Soli socio*, CIL V 5082 = ILS 4233 = CIMRM 730; CLAUS, M.: *Cultores Mithrae. Die Anhängerschaft des Mithras-Kultes*. Stuttgart 1992, 68 = AE 2005, 639 and BANZI, E.: Sistema daziario sulla rete viaria romana nel territorio altoatesino: vecchi e nuovi dati epigrafici. In CIURLETTI, G. – PISU, N. (edd): *I territori della Via Claudia Augusta: incontri di archeologia/Leben an der Via Claudia Augusta: archäologische Beiträge. Atti del convegno tenuto a Feltre, Egna, Meano, Ostiglia nel 2004–2005*. Trento 2005, 182 num. 7, referred to by PETRACCIA LUCERNONI (n. 59) 54.

⁷⁰ NAYDENOVA, S. V.: *Le mithraeum récemment découvert à Novae (Mésie Inférieure)*. *Akten des XIII. Internationale Kongresses für klassische Archäologie*. Berlin 1988, 607–608 and NAYDENOVA, S. V.: *Un sanctuaire syncrétiste de Mithra et Sol Augustus découvert à Novae (Mésie Inférieure)*. In HINNELS, R. J. (ed.): *Studies in Mithraism. Papers associated with the Mithraic Panel organized on the occasion of*

privileged, but Mithras is not excluded: both *Sol* and *Invictus Mithra* remain, comrades in the cult as they were in the mythical tale involving them, a useful clue⁷¹ which allows us to hypothesize that even the inscription from Montoro could be dated to the 3rd century.⁷²

The *tabula* from Sangemini⁷³ (fig. 16) is somehow linked to the Montoro inscription, at least because the *sacerdos legitimus* referred to belonged to the *gens Egnatia*, just like the *probatas* mentioned in the previous one. The inscription, reduced to fragments, was found in a garden in via della Rocca n. 1, property of Dr. Schiboni, together with other materials, probably from the nearby area of *Carsulae*, reused in the structure of the Benedictine monastery standing there.⁷⁴ In its text *Egnatius Reparatus*, besides being *sacerdos legitimus*, is also *collator de sestertiis V milibus nummum* offered by nine *leones*. Everyone contributes to the making of the *leonteum*,⁷⁵ with statue and accessories, *consummati*, perfected⁷⁶ (rather than simply conse-

the XVI Congress of the International Association for the History of Religion, Roma, 1990. Roma 1994, 225–228.

⁷¹ If the office of *Sevir Augustalis* can at least partially validate a 3rd century dating, it seems harder to use the earthquake as a dating element and, considering what has been said before, cf. *supra*, n. 67, it is the inscription which could be useful to date the catastrophe and not *vice versa*.

⁷² M. F. Petracchia Lucernoni hypothesizes a more extended dating for the inscription, between the first half of the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd; cf. PETRACCIA LUCERNONI (n. 59) 59, fig. 1.

⁷³ *Leonteum, cum signo et cetero cultu exornatum / ex permissu sanctissimi ordinis, ex pec(unia) sua / a solo fecerunt leones, consummati ab Egnatio Re/para[t]o sacerdote legit(imo) et collatore, / T(itus) Lepidius Ho/norinus, Alexander et Amicus circ(itores) Aug(usti) n(ostri), L(ucii duo) Vicri(i) Severus / et Speratus, T(itus) Satronius Sabinianus, P(ublius) Vatinius Iustus, L(ucius) Iulius / Felix L(ucius) Longinius Stachys faber de (sestertiis) V m(ilibus) n(ummum). L(oco) d(ato) d(ecurionum) d(ecreto);* CIOTTI (n. 59) 233–239 and tab. XXVIII.

⁷⁴ Similarly to what happened with the churches of S. Giovanni (the façade) and S. Stefano (a wall), the inscription must have been inserted originally in a wall of the monastery, then it ended up in the waste material once the structure was given a new arrangement, CIOTTI (n. 59) 238.

⁷⁵ Cf. the term *leont...on* contained in a papyrus found in Hermoupolis, Egypt, in 1906, dated to the 4th century. Its sketchy text, transcribed by Brashear (BRASHEAR, W. M.: *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt: P. Berol. 21196* [Tyche, Suppl. 1]. Wien 1992, 23, 27 and 38, cf. lines 5–6, *recto*, line 8, *recto* and line 9, *verso*) seems to contain, structured in questions and answers, a Mithraic initiation ritual, some sort of Mithraic catechism. Indeed, the references that could be ascribed to Mithraism are various, and among them the initiation to the grade of Leo alluding to the hot season and the solar fire, seems to be echoed in the famous passage by Tertullian, *Sicut aridae etardentis naturae sacramenta leones Mithrae philosophantur*, Tert. *Adv. Marc.* I 13. 5; besides, the place where this initiation should be carried out seems to be similar to the *leonteum* in the inscription from *Carsulae*. Without excluding the attribution of this text to a Mithraic environment (TURCAN, R.: Un “catéchisme” mithriaque?, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 136.3 (1992) 549–564; and TURCAN: Mithra (n. 16) 152–156, Turcan underlines how difficult it is to evaluate it correctly because much of what is Mithraic could also be ascribed to other contexts: “autres cultes d’origine orientale et plusieurs théosophies gnostiques ont intégré diversement ou partiellement la cosmologie et la mystique astrale hellénistiques”, TURCAN: Mithra (n. 16) 156. But the 4th century, the period to which the papyrus has been dated, offers a far more complex scenario than in the previous centuries; it is a time characterized by philosophical and spiritual *contaminatio*-*nes* typical of the cultural “background” of the late senatorial aristocracy.

⁷⁶ *Consummare*, here obviously referring to initiates, has otherwise been used for a *spelaeum*, an altar and part of the *spelaeum*, cf. *CIMRM* 407; *CIMRM* II 28; *TermeDiocleziano* II 74; *TermeDiocleziano* I 272; *NotSc* (1925) 48; *AE* 1926, 116, from Rome; and an altar from *Aveia Vestina*, *CIL* IX 3608 =

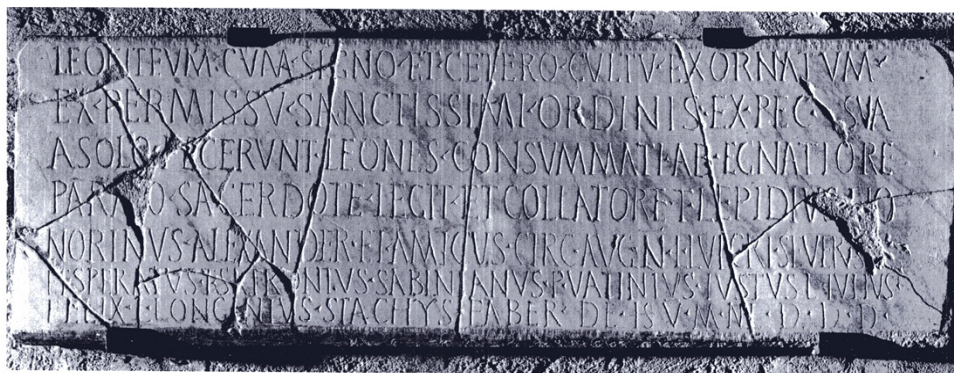


Fig. 16. *Carsulae*, inscription of *Leones* (from CIOTTI, U.: Due iscrizioni mitriache inedite. In *Hommage à Maarten J. Vermaseren*. Vol. I. Leiden 1978, 233–246, 239–246 and tab. XXVIII)

crated⁷⁷) by *Egnatius Reparatus* himself, clearly their spiritual guide. We might wonder whether in the initiatory *iter* grade IV, *Leo*, had a key “pivotal”⁷⁸ value. Also Tertullian⁷⁹ seems to be alluding to that when he attributes to them the ability to *philosophari* – probably meaning, by that, the ability to instruct.⁸⁰ Similarly, in one of the walls of Santa Prisca Mithraeum, *Leones* are associated with the idea of instruction.⁸¹ *accipe thuricremos Pater accipe sancte leones per quos thura damus per quos consumimur ipsi...*, provided that *consumimur* is read as *cosummimur* (i.e. *consummati*

CIMRM 652; or part of it, namely a mosaic floor from Ostia antica, CIL XIV 4297 = EE IX 443 = CIMRM 301 = *SdOstia* II p. 114 = *SdOstia* IV, p. 232.

⁷⁷ CIOTTI (n. 59) 236.

⁷⁸ ALOE SPADA, C.: Il leo nella gerarchia dei gradi mitraiici. In BIANCHI, U.: *Mysteria Mithrae. Proceedings of the International Seminar on the 'Religio-Historical Character of Roman Mithraism, with Particular Reference to Roman and Ostian Sources'*. Rome and Ostia 28–31 March 1978. Leiden 1979, 639–548, here 645, *status* that should also be seen in relation to the active role that such a grade had in celebrating the mysteries, as Porphyry underlines in *De abstinentia*, fr. g 11–12.

⁷⁹ Tert. *Adv. Marc.* I 13, 5.

⁸⁰ TURCAN: *Mithra* (n. 16) 137 and TURCAN (n. 64) 81.

⁸¹ “Le verbe consumer pourrait avoir, en effet, la même acception que consummare, en vertu d’une confusion dont le latin parlé et tardif nous offre quelques exemples”, TURCAN: *Mithra* (n. 16) 138; Vollgraff shares the same opinion, cf. VOLLGRAFF, W.: Le rôle des Lions dans la communauté mithriaque. *Hommages à Léon Herrmann*. *Latomus* 45 (1960) 777. *Contra*, Vermaseren translates *consumimur* with “we are consumed”, thus attributing a symbolic value to it, cf. VERMASEREN, M. J. – VAN ESSEN, C. C.: *The Excavation in the Mithraeum of the Church of Santa Prisca in Rome*. Leiden 1965, 228–229 and n. 741; about this topic cf. RENAUT, M. L.: *Marquage corporel et signation religieuse dans l’antiquité*. Thèse de doctorat soutenue le 6 décembre 2004 à l’École pratique des hautes études, Paris, dir. A. Le Boulluec (http://tel.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/27/52/45/PDF/_1_Texte.pdf) 572–588, but also RENAUT, M. L.: *Les initiés aux mystères de Mithra étaient-ils marqués au front? Pour une relecture de Tertullien*, *De praescr.* 40, 4. In BONNET, C. – RIBICHINI, S. – STEUERNAGEL, D. (edd): *Religioni in contatto nel Mediterraneo antico. Modalità di diffusione e processi di interferenza. Atti del 3° colloquio su «Le religioni orientali nel mondo greco e romano»*, Lovenjo di Menaggio (Como), 26–28 maggio, 2006. *Mediterranea* IV (2008) 171–190; and RENAUT, M. L.: Moïse, Pierre et Mithra, dispensateurs d’eau: figures et contrefigures du baptême dans l’art et la littérature des quatre premiers siècles. In FOLETTI, I. (ed.): *Fons Vitae. Baptême, Baptistères et Rites d’initiation (I^{er}–IV^e siècle)*. *Actes de la journée d’études, Université de Lausanne, 1^{er} décembre 2006*. Roma 2009, 39–64.

sumus),⁸² as it is done in the inscription from *Carsulae*. *Egnatius*, probably *Reparatus*⁸³ thanks to the spiritual *iter* undertaken, just like *Egnatius Primitivus*, does nothing that has not been allowed by the public authorities first (the decurions); and consequently the place of worship is created *ex permissu sanctissimi ordinis*.

Sentinum, on the junction of via *Flaminia* and the road going through *Helvillum*, is as far as we know the last place in *Regio VI*⁸⁴ where documentation about Mithras' cult has been found: a marble tauroctony⁸⁵ (fig. 17); a calcareous stone *tabula* dedicated to the *Numen Sanctus* of Mithras *Sol Invictus*⁸⁶ (fig. 18), connected to a *simulacrum exornatum*, probably the above-mentioned tauroctony that *Gessius Castus* and *Gessius Severus* *voto posuerunt*, on 9th September 219,⁸⁷ in the presence of priest *Caius Propertius Augurinus*;⁸⁸ a calcareous stone *ara* (fig. 19) dedicated by *leones Umber Rufinus* and *Umber Aemilianus*, *prosedente Sevio Facundo*;⁸⁹ finally a second marble *tabula* (fig. 20) with the list of *Patroni Cultores dei Invicti Mithrae*,⁹⁰ all those patrons who during the years had contributed to the community, although neither the subscribers to the simulacrum nor the ones to the *ara* are mentioned.

The tauroctony and the inscriptions come from Civita, a locality which belonged to the ancient town of *Sentinum*; they were part of the furnishings of a Mithraeum

⁸² *SPrisca* p. 187 = *CIMRM* I 485 = *AE* 1941, 76 = *AE* 1946, 83ee = *AE* 1946, 84 = *AE* 1946, 117 = *AE* 1960, 211.

⁸³ *Reparatus* could refer to a spiritual renewal of the initiate, not differently from what happened in Christian contexts where the words *Redemptus*, *Renatus*, or *Renovatus* were used with a similar meaning, cf. CIOTTI (n. 59) 237.

⁸⁴ The head with Phrygian cap on a calcareous stone relief fragment from *Pitinum Pisaurense*, Pisignano, Macerata Feltria (Pesaro Urbino), could be added to the materials discussed in this paper; it is now part of the Antimi Clari Collection, cf. SUSINI, G.: I culti orientali nella Cispadana. Fonti e materiali. In DE BOER, M. – EDRIIDGE, A. T. (eds): *Hommage à Maarten J. Vermaseren*. Vol. III. Leiden 1978, 1200), but it is difficult to establish whether it depicts Mithras or Attis.

⁸⁵ *CIMRM* I 685.

⁸⁶ *Dicatus V Id(us) Sept(embres) Antonino Aug(usto) II et Sacerdote II / co(n)s(ulibus) / N(umini) / S(ancto) S(olis) I(nvicti) M(ithrae) / duo Gessi Castus / et Severus simulacrum exornatum / voto posue(runt) prosedente / C(aio) Propertio Augurino sacerdot(e)*, *CIL* XI 5736 = *ILS* 4207 = *CIMRM* I 687 = *AE* 2006, 243 and finally CERVETTI, C. – PETRACCIA, M. F. – TRAMUNTO, M. – TRAVERSO, M.: *Camillo Ramelli e la cultura antiquaria dell'Ottocento*. Roma 2006, 121–123.

⁸⁷ The date on the upper frame is a later addition.

⁸⁸ Another later addition.

⁸⁹ *Invicto / prosedente / Sevio Facundo / Umbri / Rufinus et / Aemilianus / Leones*, *CIL* XI 5735 = *ILS* 4208 = *CIMRM* I 689 = *AE* 2006, 243 and finally CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO (n. 86) 118–120.

⁹⁰ *Cultores d(ei) S(olis) I(nvicti) Mithrae / patroni prosedente C(aio) Propertio Profuturo / Coiedius Proculus / Ligurius Theodotus / Mussius Vindex / Coiedius Hilarianus / Sentin(as) Ianuarius // pater leonum / Titius Castor / Pompeus Pompeianus / Gessius Optabilis / Ligurius Clementinus / Plotius Fortunatus / Licinius Faustus / Aetrius Romanus / Asinius Commod[us] / Visenn(ius) Quinq[ue]nnalis / [// Pompon(ius) Victor / Statius Velox / Vassiden(us) Verus / Helvenat(ius) Celer / Carfan(ius) Achille(s) / Casidius Rufin(us) / Antist(ius) Benign(us) / Aetrius Irenaeus / Helven(atius) Gemellin(us) / Iulius Victorin(us) / C[a]ecil(ius) Sozo(n) / [3]IIE[3] / [// Rantif(anus) Verus / Caesoni(us) Dexter / Ianuarius Sent(inatium) / Aelius Ylas / Coied(ius) Pamphil(us) / Aduren(us) Theseus / Coied(ius) Auxanon / D(ecimo) Menesterio / T(ito) Sevio Felice / [, *CIL* XI 5737 = *ILS* 4215 = *CIMRM* I 688 = *AE* 2006, 243 and finally CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO (n. 86) 124–128.*



Fig. 17. *Sentinum*, tauroctony (photo courtesy of Prof.ssa M. F. Petraccia, University of Genoa, 2004)

located in an area called *Insula del Pozzo*,⁹¹ where very fine architectural materials have been found throughout the centuries, as count Camillo Ramelli himself noted:

“...the existence of an eastern granite column which had been lying there on the ground for years, and the fact that in the previous centuries other similar columns had been found there and moved somewhere else; this was

⁹¹ CATANI, E.: Le vicende antiquarie del mosaico sentinate ora alla glittoteca di Monaco. *Picus* 16–17 (1996–1997) 23–73, here 45.



Fig. 18. *Sentinum*, tabula dedicated to the *Numen Sanctus* of Mithras (from CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO [n. 86] 121)



Fig. 19. *Sentinum*, ara (from CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO [n. 86] 121)

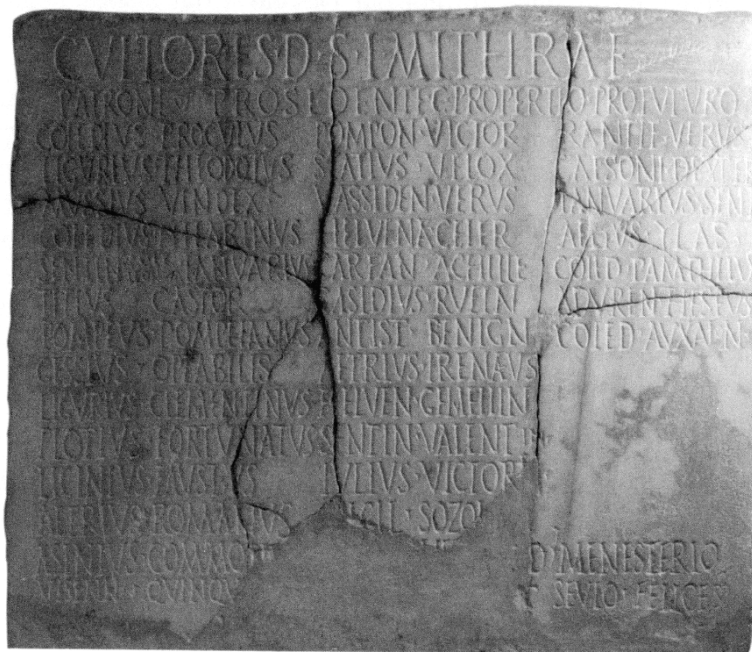


Fig. 20. *Sentinum*, list of *Cultores Mithrae*
(from CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO [n. 86] 120)

enough for the mind to imagine how magnificent and richly decorated those spacious buildings must have been in the past”.⁹²

Besides, the Mithraeum was probably annexed to a nearby *domus* dated to the imperial period, whose *tablinum* was decorated with the famous *Aion*⁹³ mosaic, now in Munich.⁹⁴

“a rich urban *domus*, with a typical Italic structure, characterized by a monumental atrium with an inner pool, a large central *tablinum* whose floor depicted *Aion*, *Tellus* and the Seasons, and two *triclinium* rooms on

⁹² RAMELLI, C.: *Monumenti mitriaci di Sentinum antico municipio romano*. Fermo 1853, 29–30.

⁹³ The mosaic in *Sentinum* has a very long story to tell. It was found inside the Merolli Roselli property in 1806, as Ramelli correctly reports (RAMELLI [n. 92] 29, while CUMONT I [n. 14] 298 and 419–420, and VERMASEREN [CIMRM I 686] date it to 1826–1827), then sold without imposing any particular conditions to Eugenio de Beauharnais between 1806 and 1814. When, almost twenty years later, duchess Leuchtenberg, widow de Beauharnais, decided to give it as a present to her brother Ludwig I of Bavaria, the political situation had changed completely: the Pope was again the owner of the territories in the Marche and removing the mosaic from the *domus* would have meant asking for a special detailed permission as foreseen by the Editto Pacca (cf. art. 14). When permission was finally obtained, the mosaic was divided into sections, transferred onto stone slates and moved to Senigallia. From there, travelling by sea, it reached Trieste and went on, by land, to Munich, where Ludwig was finally able to admire it in October 1828, cf. CATANI (n. 91) 23–73.

⁹⁴ Munich Glyptothek, room XI, inv. W50436.

both sides of the tablinum, one of which hosted a mosaic floor decorated with Oceanus's mask",⁹⁵

similarly the so-called "House of the Mithraeum" in *Colonia Augusta Emerita*, Merida,⁹⁶ the *tablinum* floor is paved with a mosaic depicting cosmological subjects:⁹⁷ *Chaos*, *Caelum*, *Saeculum*, *Polum*, *Zephyrum*, *Oriens*, *Occasus*, *Aeternitas*, *Sol* and *Luna*.⁹⁸

So far, these are the only materials from *Sentinum*⁹⁹ and the hypothesis of a second Mithraeum in the area of S. Croce monastery, made by Ramelli¹⁰⁰ and based on an inscription dedicated to Serapis¹⁰¹ found there, seems to be highly implausible.

The tauroctony described as acephalous by Vermaseren,¹⁰² seems actually to be on the whole intact, as shown in a recent photographic reproduction¹⁰³ (only the right forearm is missing) and the inscriptions¹⁰⁴ collected by Ramelli are still kept in Palazzo Raccamadoro-Ramelli in Fabriano,¹⁰⁵ in its hall and lapidarium. Among them, the most interesting document is the list¹⁰⁶ of *Patroni Cultores dei Invicti Mithrae*. Plausibly compiled over time,¹⁰⁷ perhaps starting around or after AD 219, the probable date of the tauroctony dedication, it begins with these words: *prosedente C. Properatio Profuturo*. The *patroni* are thirty-five in total and among them *Ianuarius Sentinas* stands out with the role of *Pater leonum*. Their names are divided into three columns (fourteen names in the first and another fourteen in the second, while the third column

⁹⁵ CATANI (n. 91) 44.

⁹⁶ *CIMRM* I 772–797. However, the precise location of the Mithraeum is unknown, also because a modern *Plaza de toros* has been built on the zone.

⁹⁷ CATANI (n. 91) 46.

⁹⁸ MUSSO, L.: *Il Sole è misura del Tempo! L'immagine del Tempo eterno nella sua manifestazione solare*. In MEDRI, M. (ed.): *Sentinum 295 a.C. Sassoferrato 2006. 2300 anni dopo la battaglia. Una città romana tra storia e archeologia. Atti del Convegno Internazionale, Sassoferrato 2006*. Roma 2008, 151–190, here 155.

⁹⁹ As for the other supposed finds in the area called *Insula del pozzo*, from which the Aion mosaic undoubtedly comes, it is necessary to add that maybe the jasper with a Mithraic representation also bought by Eugenio de Beauharnais comes from the same place (an interesting remark which unfortunately cannot be taken any further without other evidence MICHELI, M. E.: *Tryphon a Sentinum?* In *Sentinum* (n. 98) 127–139, here 127, as well as a jasper with Serapis' head, *recto*, and Greek letters, *verso*, probably found in 1844, RAMELLI (n. 92) 45–47.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Cumont I (n. 14) mon. 298 and *CIMRM* I 686.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *infra*, n. 104.

¹⁰² Cf. *CIMRM* I 686.

¹⁰³ Cf. photo by courtesy by Prof.ssa M. F. Petraccia, University of Genoa.

¹⁰⁴ Among the five inscriptions described as Mithraic, cf. DAMIANI, P.: *Riuso dell'antico. Il caso dell'abbazia di Santa Croce*. In *Sentinum* (n. 98) 399–404, here 402, n. 10, only three actually refer to the god, while the other two refer respectively to an unidentified divinity and to Serapis, cf., *supra*, n. 101: *Deo Frondisiae / ex voto feliciter*, *CIL* XI 5734; *Iovi Soli / Invicto / Sarapidi / T(itus) Aelius / AntiPater / procurator) Augg(ustorum) / cum Umbricia / Bassa coniuge / gratbriias / agentes / posuerunt*, *CIL* XI 5738 = *ILS* 4397 = *SIRIS* 583 = *RICIS* II 510/201.

¹⁰⁵ RAMELLI (n. 92) 15–16.

¹⁰⁶ CERVETTI-PETRACCIA-TRAMUNTO-TRAVERSO (n. 86) 124–128.

¹⁰⁷ Similarly to the table in *Virunum*, cf. D'AMBROSIO, L.: *A proposito della tavola di Virunum*. *RSAnt* 26 (1996) 133–192, although Cumont dates the list on its whole to 160, cf. CUMONT I (n. 14) *inscr.* 157.

lists seven names, then shows five empty lines – probably to leave room for other names – and then two more names at the end). The social origin of the *patroni* is “heterogenous, since the list includes not only the names of *ingenui* but also two freedmen, *Sentinias Ianuarius* and *Sentinias Valentinus*, and the name of a *servus publicus*, *Ianuarius Sentinatium*”.¹⁰⁸

As for the fact that *Aetrius Romanus*, third from the bottom of the first column, *Staius Velox* and *Casidius Rufinus*, registered in the second column, second and sixth position (then almost in the middle of the list), also appear among the members of a *Collegium fabrum Sentinatium* mentioned in a decree dated 260,¹⁰⁹ that could be a useful clue to hypothesize that the list, started earlier, continued to be updated over time until the second half of the 3rd century, noting down the names of the *patroni* who contributed in various ways to meet the needs of their community (perhaps *C. Propertius Profuturus* described as *prosedens* should not be included among the *patroni* themselves). Then, after 260, some difficulty might have impeded the regular compilation of the third column of this document, which otherwise appears to have been written down with great care.¹¹⁰ After all, *Sentinum* might have been affected by the same negative consequences of the Military Anarchy influencing the life of *Cultores Mithrae* almost everywhere; in this fifty-year period, throughout the Empire, a decrease in documentation related to the Persian god, as well as to other cults, seems by now to have been definitely ascertained.¹¹¹

CONCLUSIONS

The few materials examined so far provide, on the whole, a fairly accurate chronological account of the spread of Mithras’ cult in *Regio VI Umbria* between the 2nd and the 3rd centuries, from its beginning to its end, which probably was enacted without that clamour hypothesized and dramatically described by Erolì:

“... Christ’s new followers, triumphing over paganism, started to tear down its temples and destroy its idols or, when complete destruction seemed to be impossible, tried at least to damage them as much as they could”.¹¹²

Its disappearance was the logical and inevitable consequence of events which led the Empire to make different choices about religious matters. Moreover, there are no elements in this area which might allow us to think of a possible revival of the cult in the 4th century; on the contrary, its practice seems to have survived only within the strict circle of Tetrarchs and the even closer circle of Roman aristocracy members.

¹⁰⁸ CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO (n. 86) 120.

¹⁰⁹ *CIL* XI 5748 = *ILS* 7220.

¹¹⁰ Cf. CERVETTI–PETRACCIA–TRAMUNTO–TRAVERSO (n. 86) 127.

¹¹¹ It is noteworthy that a certain *Gamaliōs* (but concerning the cult of Cybele) speaks of a “night” (i.e. an either total or partial suspension) which lasted 28 years.

¹¹² Cf. *supra*, n. 13.

We know the social origins of these *Cultores Mithrae* – there are freemen, freedmen and some slaves – although only in very few cases do we also know the public offices they covered and the duties they performed: *Sextus Egnatius Primitivus* is *Sevir Augustalis* in *Casuentum* and *Quaestor Arcae Augustalium* in *Carsulae*; *Visennius* is *Quinquinnalis* in *Sentinum*; *Alexander et Amicus* are *circitores Augusti Nostri* in *Carsulae*, and there are four *fabri*, *Felix Lucius Longinius Stachys* in *Carsulae* and *Aetrius Romanus*, *Stadius Velox* and *Casidius Rufinus* in *Sentinum*. In an initiatory context a *Pater* is mentioned in *Ocriculum*, nine are the *Leones* in *Carsulae*, a *Pater leonum* and another two *Leones* are documented in *Sentinum*; three are the *sacerdotes* mentioned in total: the *legitimus* one in *Carsulae*, the *probatus* one in the inscription from Montoro, both belonging to the *Gens Egnatia*, and *Caius Propertius Augurinus* in *Sentinum*; besides, three initiates in *Sentinum* are *prosedentes* (one is the priest mentioned before) and probably they supervised, or at least witnessed, the dedication of the tauroctony, the dedication of the *ara* and the first compilation of the list of *Patroni Cultores Dei Solis Invicti Mithrae*. Finally, at least three nicknames derive from Mithras' cult, in that they were cultic *supernomina* testifying to an initiatory rebirth: *Primitivus* in *Carsulae*, *Reparatus* in the inscription from Montoro and *Profuturus* in *Sentinum*.

Mithraism is a mosaic which in the course of time and not without difficulty scholars have been trying to recompose. *Ocriculum*, *Interamna Nahars*, *Carsulae*, *Trebiae*, *Spoletium*, *Sentinum*, and even *Casuentum*, now disappeared, are just a few *tesserae* we have to insert into the large puzzle of this cult which was born with the empire and for the Empire and which, although based on mystery rites and therefore invisible to most, was present in the territory and clearly visible to the authorities,¹¹³ especially the urban ones, the *ordo decurionum* or the *sanctissimus ordo decurionum*, on whose permission – *ex permissu* – a *leonteum* was built in *Carsulae* and another one, destroyed by an earthquake, was rebuilt between *Carsulae* and *Casuentum*.

Initiates dedicate, build, and rebuild in the name of their god, always contributing personally to the expenses, and in *Regio VI* Mithraea are created in town buildings and in *villae*, wherever there were activities which directly or indirectly contributed to the economy and stability of the Empire. It thus follows that any event which might have weakened the political system would also have had fatal consequences for Mithras' cult.

Starting from the 3rd century, in concurrence with a serious political crisis, economic recession spreads through the empire; it is exactly in this period, as J. Geffcken pointed out, that pagan religious life starts to show signs of decadence. Many temples are closed, many festivals disappear. This phenomenon increases under the Christian emperors; in fact, the institutions of the ancient religion are progressively denied state support.

¹¹³ MASTROCINQUE, A.: Mithra e gli imperatori. In GNOLI, GH. – SFAMENI GASPARRO, G. (a cura di): *Potere e religione nel mondo indo-mediterraneo tra ellenismo e tarda-antichità*. Roma 2009, 171–183.

The time will come when – and this will happen in Rome in the second half of the 4th century – only private contribution and local support from members of the aristocracy emotionally linked to the past will allow Mithras' worshippers to preserve their old customs and traditions.¹¹⁴

Economic stagnation and Military Anarchy seriously affect every activity and in this utterly unstable scenario also Mithras was condemned to an eclipse which, in this area of the empire, was fatal.

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¹¹⁴ HADOT, P.: *La felicità degli antichi*. Milano 2011, 119–150.

